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ABSTRACT

In this lesson, middle school students explore a musical expression, the sea chantey, which provided a rhythm necessary to help 19th century sailors work together. Objectives are to help students understand the purpose of sea chanties, realize how different types of chanties were especially suited to different types of jobs, and identify the chantey rhythm. Two 30-minute periods are required to teach the lesson. On day 1, students read and discuss a letter from the "Old Mariner" describing his experiences at sea and study a map of the route of his ship, the Sea Serpent. They also study sketches of the Sea Serpent's rigging and of sailors performing a variety of tasks. On day 2, students learn four different chanties and role play the actions that accompany them. The letter, map, sketches, and lyrics for the chanties are provided in the lesson. Also included are a history of the sea chantey, teacher instructions, and a listing of student and teacher resource materials. (RM)

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"Worth Ten Men On A Rope"

A Lesson Plan

on

Sea Chanties

Level: Middle School

Key Idea:
Sea chanties developed out of the work performed by nineteenth century sailors. The songs provided a rhythm necessary to help the sailors work together. Different types of chanties were used to help sailors carry out different jobs aboard ship.

Prerequisite Knowledge:
Students should be familiar with the nature of nineteenth century ships and the types of jobs performed by the sailors aboard those ships.

Student Objectives:
Upon completion of this lesson the pupil will be able to:
(1) Explain the purpose of sea chanties.
(2) Explain how different types of chanties were especially suited to different types of jobs.
(3) Identify the chantey rhythm and role play the actions that accompanied it.
(4) Describe the value of the chanties in helping the sailors to work together.

Materials:
Record player or cassette recorder
Recording or cassette of chanties
Copies of letters from the Old Mariner
Copies of lyrics of chanties
Copies of sketches of ship's rigging, map, and sailors at work.
Rope and capstan - optional

Time:
Two thirty-minute periods.

Background Information:
People have sung as they worked from the days of prehistory until the present; many to quicken the long hours in the fields and others because they simply enjoyed it. In this lesson pupils will explore a musical expression, the sea chantey, that grew out of a particular kind of work and that in turn helped the workers perform their labor more effectively. The sea chantey was born on the yard arm, at the end of a line (rope) and at the bar of the capstan.

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While the earliest recorded reference of sailors singing at their work comes from the early fifteenth century, the heyday of the chantey was the nineteenth century, especially between 1830 and 1890. This was the time period during which large three-masted, square-rigged ships came into use. Flooding the sky with sail these "sharp" ships or "clippers" were designed for speed and were manned by relatively small crews. Competition between lines and individual ships was keen, necessitating that the ship constantly carry as much sail as the wind and weather permitted. Because of the frequent need for changing and adjusting the sails with a limited number of men, chanties came into regular use.

The chanties provided the strong rhythm needed for the men to work as one and thus work more effectively in raising the heavy sails, weighing anchor, or performing other heavy tasks. Thus, the chantey man, the one who led the chanties, became "worth ten men on a rope". Because the rhythm was the important factor in the chanties, the lyrics are often nonsensical or meaningless. Although at times they reflect the feelings or situation of those who sung them, lyrics were always secondary to the rhythm which brought with it a unity of effort.

Chanties developed which were closely identified with the strenuousness and the rhythm best suited to carrying out a particular task. Although there are many different ways of classifying chanties, some of the major types are identified below:

(1) Sing-out: Wild and usually rapid chant used in very light hoisting or lowering of sails.
(2) Hand-over-hand: Two or three men in time would grab a rope and pull first with one hand and then with the other in order to hoist the light triangular sails.
(3) Short-drag or short-haul: Sung fairly fast when hoisting the foresail, royals and skysails.
(4) Long-drag or halyard chantey: Used in raising topsails and topgallants.
(5) Stamp-'n'-go or Walkaway: Used with rope hauling when a sufficiently large crew permitted sailors to keep the rhythm by stamping their feet in march time.
(6) Bunting Chanties: Sung while heaving and rolling the heavy canvas into position.
(7) Windlass and Capstan chanties: Sung by 8-16 men while loading cargo, weighing anchor or pulling through locks.
(8) Pumping chanty: Used while operating the ships pumps, especially pumping bilge.

An example of four different types of chanties will be given in this lesson. A short explanation follows:

Paddy Doyle: (Bunting Chantey) Bunting a sail took one strenuous heave to lift the heavy canvas and another to heave it into position.

Haul Away, Joe!: (Short-Drag Chantey) Used in hoisting medium-weight sails with a strong pull on the last word.

Leave Her Johnny: (Capstan Chantey) Sung only at the end of a trip while lowering anchor, pumping, or pulling through locks.

Fire! Fire!: (Pumping Chantey) Used when pumping bilge.

Introducing the Lesson:

a. Ask pupils to recall examples of people singing as they work, i.e., cowboys singing as they watched cattle at night, etc.
b. Ask pupils to hypothesize why people might sing as they work.
c. Ask pupils to recall times when they have sung while they worked or played, i.e., jump rope songs, etc.
d. Ask pupils what purposes the singing might have served.
e. Explain to pupils that today they will learn about a special type of work song, the sea chantey.

Developing the Lesson: Day One

Hand out the letter from the Old Mariner explaining that the experience he describes is typical for many sailors during the mid-nineteenth century.

a. Place the following questions on the board and draw attention to them before pupils read the letter.
   (1) What time period did the letter describe?
   (2) What was the ship like that the Old Mariner sailed on?
   (3) What did the sailors do aboard ship?
   (4) What are sea chanties?
   (5) How did the chanties help the sailors do their work?
b. After students have read the letter, discuss each of the answers to each of the questions.
c. Show pupils sketches of the rigging carried by the Sea Serpent and of sailors performing a variety of tasks. Material can be given to pupils on a handout or shown on the overhead projector.
d. Discuss how a rhythmic song might help sailors perform these duties.
e. Show pupils a map of the route of the Sea Serpent explaining that the route was typical of many ships of the day. Explain the extremes of wind and weather. Also, explain that "clippers" were much faster than other ships of the day.

Developing the Lesson: Day Two

Explain that there were different types of chanties for different types of jobs and that the rhythm of specific chanties developed to fit specific tasks.

a. Have pupils listen to recording of Paddy Doyle, a used in bunting.
   (1) Have pupils sing the chantey.
   (2) Have pupils role play the bunting.
   (3) Discuss how the rhythm helps pupils to haul together.
b. Have pupils listen to recording of Haul Away, Joe, a short-drag used in raising the foresail.
   (1) Have pupils sing the chantey.
   (2) Have pupils role play the hauling of the rope.
   (3) Discuss how the rhythm helps pupils to haul together.
   (4) Have pupils compare the rhythm of the short-drag to the bunting chantey.
c. Have pupils listen to Leave Her, Johnny, a capstan chantey used in weighing anchor, etc.
   (1) Follow a similar discussion process used in a and b.
d. Have pupils listen to Fire! Fire!, a pumping chantey.
   (1) Follow a similar discussion process used in a, b, and c.
e. Have pupils compare the rhythms of all four chanties. Discuss how the rhythm fit the particular task.

Concluding the Lesson:

Discuss with pupils how the rhythm of the chantey helped the men work together. Ask why it was important to work together. Have pupils relate some of their own experiences in working together.

Ask pupils to imagine that they are seamen on a clipper in the mid-nineteenth century. Provide them with a choice of the following expressive activities.

a. Keep a week-long diary of your experiences aboard ship.
b. Write a letter back home describing all or part of your first three months at sea.
c. Select a task and write three stanzas of a chanty designed to help the sailors work together in completing the task.

Evaluation:
Use the following questions for class discussion:

a. What is a sea chantey.
b. How did chanties help sailors perform their duties?
c. Why do you think chanties came into existence?
d. Why do you think chanties died out?
e. Mechanization has eliminated the need for sea chanties. Does this represent a loss or a gain for modern society.

A LETTER

FROM

AN OLD MARINER

I was born in New York in 1834. After tiring of going to school and working at a number of different jobs, I decided to go to sea aboard the Sea Serpent in 1854. We shipped from New York on February 24, 1854 and did not return until February 15, 1855. During that year we sailed around the world; visiting the ports of San Francisco, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. Your teacher will show you a map of my journeys.

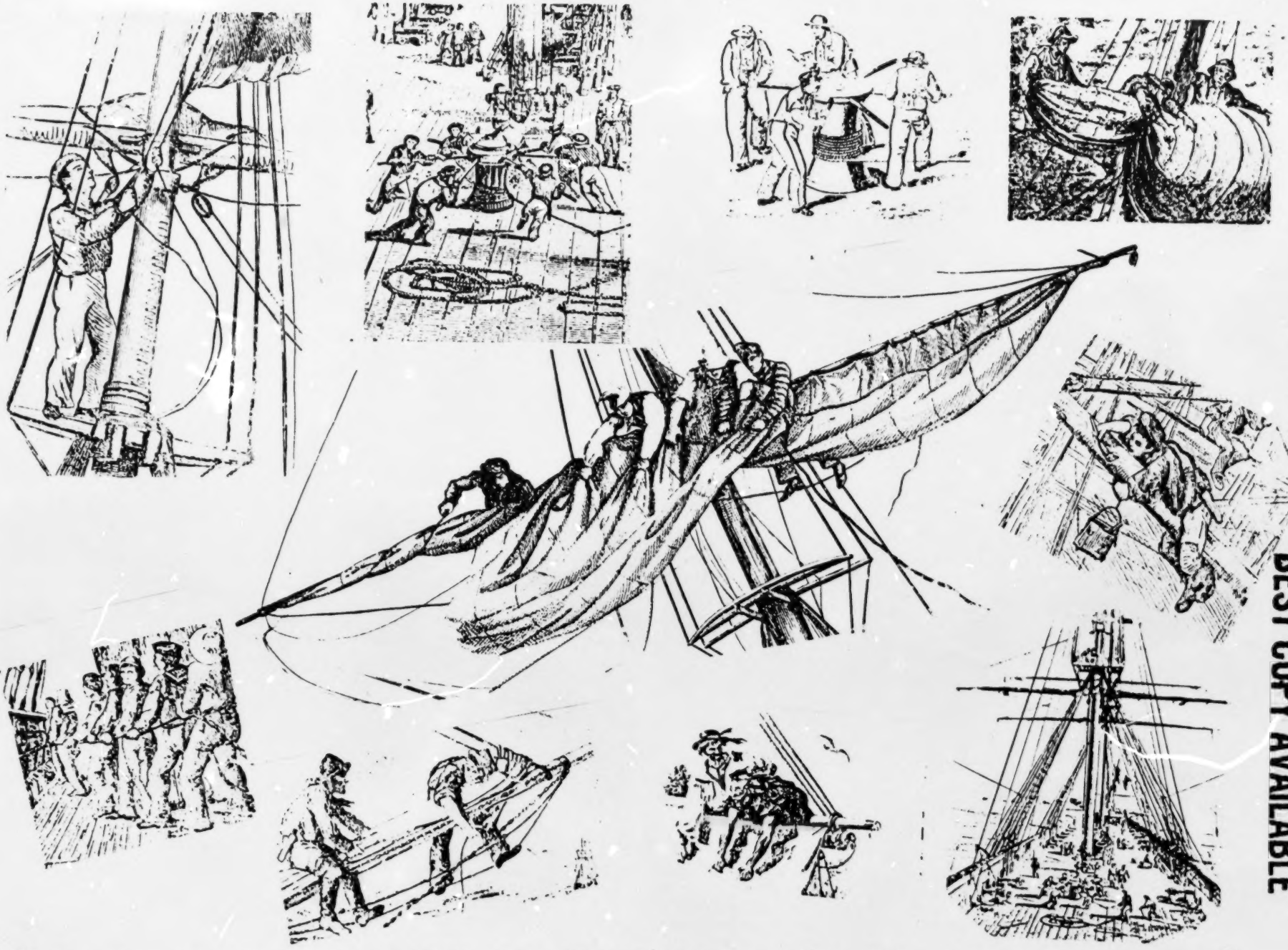
The Sea Serpent was a "clipper" ship, built in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1851. She was built for speed, carrying as much sail as she could. Your teacher will show you a picture of her. She was a real beauty. Because of her sleek shape and all of her sails, the Sea Serpent could make San Francisco in just over 100 days.

Because we always needed to sail at top speed and because the wind often changed directions, we were constantly adjusting the ship's sails. This was a hard job in calm weather, but during a storm it was very difficult and very dangerous. In high winds or storms we had to shorten (reef) or completely take in (furl) the sails. As the wind changed directions we would change the angle of the sails or move them from side to side. Sometimes we had to do this more than a dozen times a day.

The sails were always heavy and were even heavier when they had gotten wet during a storm. It took a lot of effort to raise or furl them even though many of us worked together. Work songs or chanties made the job easier. A chanteyman would lead the song and all of us boys would join in on the course. As we sang together we would follow the rhythm of the song so that we would all pull or lift together.

We had many different chanties for the different jobs that we had to do. There were special chanties for lifting heavy sails and light sails, for lifting sails a short distance or a long distance, for rolling sails around the yard arm, for raising the anchor, and even for pumping water our of the hold. Each chantey had a special rhythm that helped us work together to do a special job.

Your teacher will show you pictures of some of the different jobs we did. She will also teach you some of our special songs so that you can sing them just as we did many years ago. With the help of these songs and a little imagination, you can journey back over 100 years and spend some time with me on the high seas.



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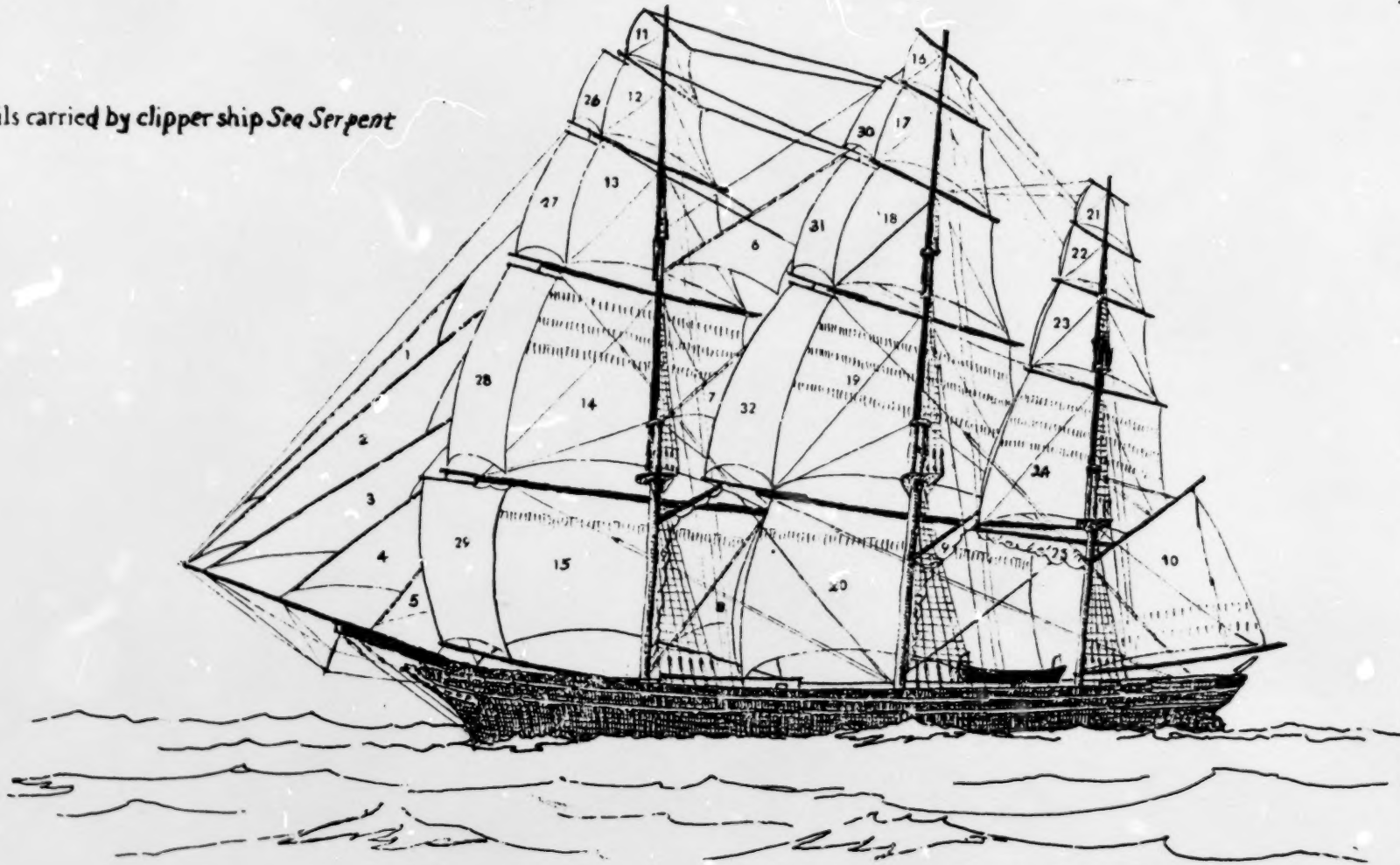
7 Taken from Stan Hugill, Songs of the Sea. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977.

Sails carried by clipper ship *Sea Serpent*



1. Flying jib
2. Jib topsail
3. Outer jib
4. Inner jib
5. Fore-topmast staysail
6. Main-royal staysail
7. Main-topgallant staysail
8. Main-topmast staysail
9. Spencer (brailed)
10. Spanker
11. Fore-skysail
12. Fore-royal
13. Fore topgallant sail
14. Fore-topsail
15. Foresail, or forecourse
16. Main skysail
17. Main royal
18. Main-topgallant sail
19. Main topsail
20. Mainsail, or main course
21. Mizzen skysail
22. Mizzen royal
23. Mizzen-topgallant sail
24. Mizzen topsail
25. Crossjack (furled), or mizzen course
26. Port fore-royal studding sail
27. Port fore-topgallant studding sail
28. Port fore-topmast studding sail
29. Port fore lower studding sail
30. Port main-royal studding sail
31. Port main-topgallant studding sail
32. Port main-topmast studding sail

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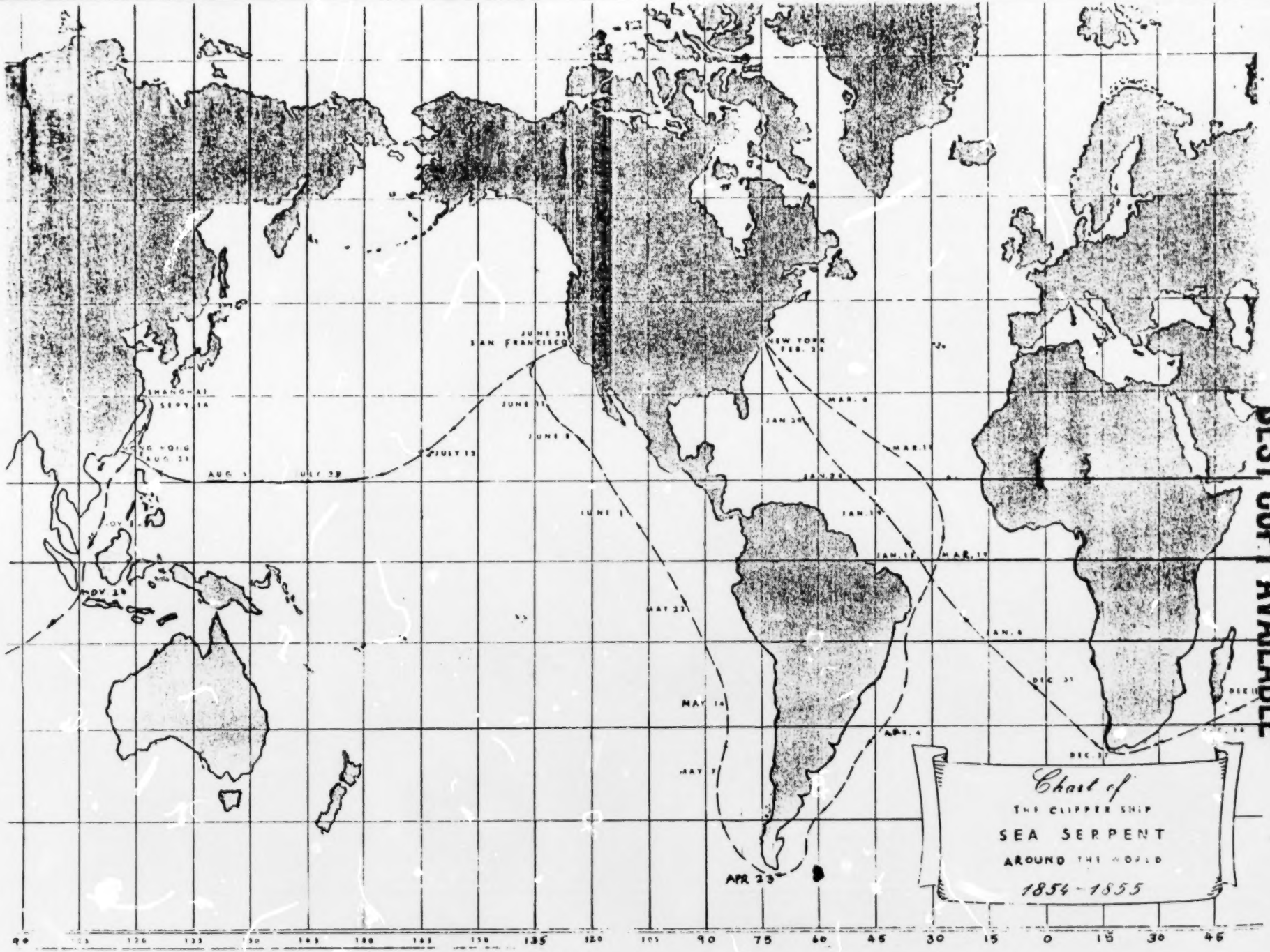
Taken from Robert H. Burgess, ed. The Sea Serpent Journal. Newport News, Virginia: The Mariners Museum, 1975.



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Taken from Robert H. Burgess, ed. The Sea Serpent Journal. Newport News, Virginia: The Mariners Museum, 1975.

Lyrics for Chanties

Paddy Doyle

To my way, hay, high, ay!
We'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots!

To my way, hay, high, ay!
We'll all shave under the chin!

To my way, hay, high, ay!
We'll all drink whiskey and gin!

Haul Away, Joe

Chanteyman: Oh, when I was a little boy,
And so my mother told me,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll
haul away, Joe!

Chanteyman: That if I did not kiss the girls,
My lips would all grow moldy,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll
haul away, Joe!

Chanteyman: Once I was in Ireland,
A-digging turf and praties,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll
haul away, Joe!

Chanteyman: But now I'm on a Yankee ship
A-hauling sheets and braces,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll
haul away, Joe!

Chanteyman: 'Way, haul away,
We'll haul away together,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll
haul away, Joe!

Chanteyman: 'Way, haul away,
We'll haul for better weather,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll
haul away, Joe!

Chanteyman: King Louis was the King of France
Before the Revolution,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll haul away, Joe!

Chanteyman: But then he got his head cut off,
Which spoiled his constitution,

Chorus: Way, haul away, we'll haul away, Joe!

Leave Her, Johnny

1. Chanteyman: Oh times are hard and the wages low,

Chorus: Leave her Johnny, leave her,

Chanteyman: Well, I guess it's time for us to go

Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.

2. Chanteyman: I thought I heard the old man say,

Chorus: Leave her Johnny, leave her,

Chanteyman: You can go ashore and draw your pay,

Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.

3. Chanteyman: It's rotten beef and weevily bread,

Chorus: Leave her Johnny, leave her,

Chanteyman: It's pump or drawn the old man said,

Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.

4. Chanteyman: The sails all furled and the work is done,

Chorus: Leave her Johnny, leave her,

Chanteyman: And now ashore we'll take our run,

Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.

5. Chanteyman: Oh, what will us poor shellbacks do,

Chorus: Leave her Johnny, leave her,

Chanteyman: Our money's gone, no work to do

Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.

6. Chanteyman: The rats have gone, and we the crew,

Chorus: Leave her Johnny, leave her.

Chanteyman: It's time, by God, that we went too,

Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.

Fire! Fire!

1. Chanteyman: There's a fire in the galley,
There's a fire down below,
Fetch a bucket of water, girls,
There's fire down below.

Chorus: Fire! Fire! Fire down below.
It's fetch a bucket of water, girls,
There's fire down below.

2. Chanteyman: There's a fire in the foretop,
There's a fire in the main;
Fetch a bucket of water girls,
And put it out again.

Chorus: Fire! Fire! Fire down below.
It's fetch a bucket of water, girls,
There's fire down below.

3. Chanteyman: There's a fire to the starboard,
There's a fire in the stern.
Fetch a bucket of water girls,
Let's give the pump a turn.

Chorus

Chanteyman: As I walked out one morning fair
All in the month of June,
I overheard an Irish girl
A-singing this old tune.

Chorus

Resources

Records:

Foc'sle Songs and Shanties, sung by Paul Clayton and the Foc'sle Singers. New York: Folkways Records, 1959.

Songs and Sounds of the Sea. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1973.

Books:

John Langstaff. Hi! Ho! The Rattlin' Bog and Other Folk Songs For Group Singing. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1969.

Stan Hugill. Songs of the Sea: The Tales and Tunes of Sailors and Sailing Ships. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1977.

For Teachers:

Robert H. Burgess,ed. The Sea Serpent Journal. Newport News, Virginia: The Mariners Museum, 1975.

One can gain insight into life aboard a clipper ship by reading the journal kept by Hugh Gregory as he sailed around the world on the Sea Serpent in 1854 and 1855. This journal served as the inspiration for the "Letter from the Old Mariner".